Intercultural dialogue on responsibility towards nature

-put into perspective of a critical discussion of view of nature in Western culture

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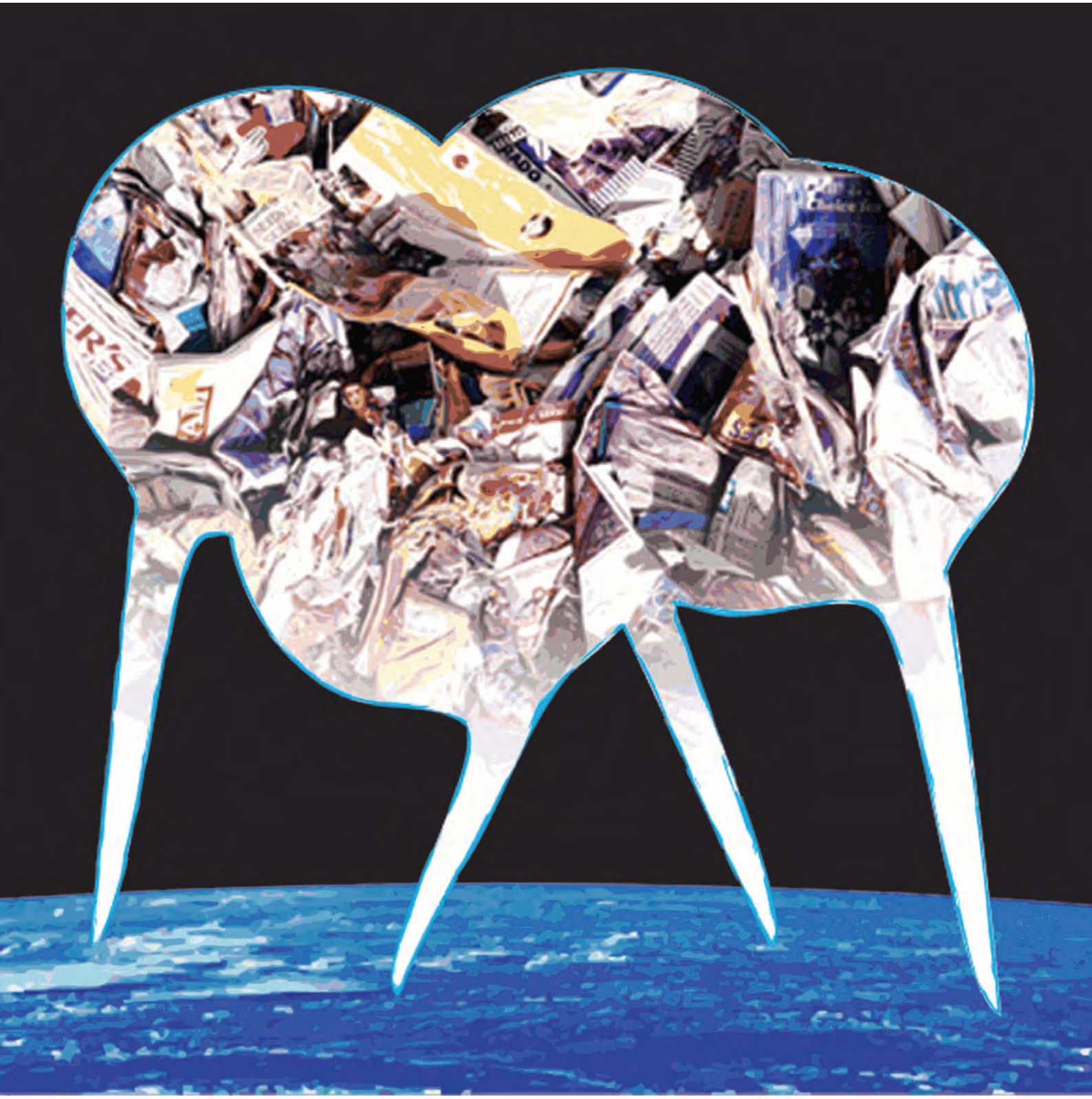

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Contents

Introduction

If you want to affect other people, you should - first and foremost - affect yourself. If you want others to act responsibly, you should reflect critically on your own notions of responsibility. If you want to enter into dialogue with others, you need to enter into dialogue with yourself to prepare an open-minded and listening attitude.

These statements do not merely apply to an individual level, but also to a cultural level. In consequence, a critical reflection on one's own culture is an important basis for opening one's mind to dialogue with other cultures.

An open-minded approach does not equal pure relativism, but should interact with a decisive approach to the need of responsibility, compared with challenges of cross-cultural interest - such as global ecological problems in general, and specifically, human-induced climate change.

In the light of these introductory reflections, the aim of this paper is to contribute to an intercultural dialogue on responsibility towards nature, centred round a critical discussion of responsibility in Western culture, which represents the cultural background of the author. Since responsibility towards nature is the main issue, a focal point is view of nature, but perceived as an integrated aspect of a general life and world view.

A critical discussion may need a frame of reference for the critique. The quest is for a perspective on responsibility which may appeal cross-culturally. Knowing fully that the identification of such perspective is influenced by history and culture, the validity of the perspective should be tried out through a dialogue.

The content of this paper is organised in three sections:

1. In brief, the next section presents a general perspective on conditions of responsibility, relevant to intercultural dialogue on values in relation to problems of common interest.
2. With reference to predominant views rooted in Western culture, the main content of the paper is a discussion on causes of ecological problems; barriers to solutions to the problems (lack of responsibility); and barriers to an equal dialogue between cultures.
3. Finally, the previously outlined perspective on conditions of responsibility and its implications are reconsidered.

A perspective on conditions of responsibility, relevant to intercultural dialogue

In between an open-minded and a decisive approach

Problems that concern all people on earth - such as global environmental problems and specifically human-induced climate change - provide us with a dilemma between:

- A *decisive* approach to the necessity of problem solving, including the adoption of responsible attitudes and actions. The risk is dogmatic universalism, regardless of cultural diversity.
- An *open-minded* approach to the variety of cultures, including a respectful attitude towards cultural diversity. The risk is pure relativism, regardless of the necessity of problem solving.

The basic assumption that human beings are situated in between a decisive and an open approach is not related to specific problems. Rather, it is a condition of our human existence,

including human understanding, human dialogue, and not least intercultural dialogue. In any dialogue, and as *receptive* beings, we are challenged to open our minds to unexpected views of other participants, even if these views are at variance with our conventional thinking. However, when the aim is to *contribute* to the dialogue, we cannot adopt a solely receptive approach, but we should also propound our own views. How can we set an agenda which satisfies the approach 'in-between'- meaning in between openness and decisiveness?

As a contribution to the dialogue on responsibility towards nature, this paper searches for a perspective which may *appeal* cross-culturally.

Hence, the following question will be reflected: *What are the conditions of responsibility?* Since the aim is to discuss responsibility towards nature, the question may be specified as follows: *What are the conditions of responsibility towards nature?*

Responsibility towards nature, however, is merely a special instance of responsibility in general.

Conditions of responsibility: a general perspective

Let me take my starting point in a statement presented by a speaker on the floor at a public hearing in Nairobi in 1986, arranged by the World Commission on Environment and Development, which published the report "Our Common Future" in 1987. The statement is quoted in the report, and it reads as follows:

> "If the desert is growing, forest disappearing, malnutrition increasing, and people in urban areas living in very bad conditions, it is not because we are lacking resources but the kind of policy implemented by our rulers, by the elite group. Denying people rights and peoples' interests is pushing us to a situation where it is only the poverty that has a very prosperous future in Africa. And it is our hope that your Commission, the World Commission, will not overlook these problems of human rights in Africa and will put emphasis on it. Because it is only free people, people who have rights, who are mature and responsible citizens, who then participate in the development and in the protection of the environment."(World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, Chapter 2, section 19).

Especially, the keywords "free people", including "people who have rights", should be noticed. People who are suppressed, who are exposed to power, cannot be expected to take responsibility for matters of general interest, such as global ecological problems. Hence, freedom of people is assumed to be a first condition for responsibility; namely for the ability to act with responsibility.

The *ability* to act responsibly has a counterpart in the *challenge* to act responsibly. Responsibility is oriented towards an otherness, meaning something else than oneself. Depending on the situation, the otherness may include other people whether close or at distance, such as mankind and future generations, and the otherness may include non-human phenomena, such as local nature or the entire earth. The challenge to act responsibly depends on an alliance or connection or sympathetic interdependence with the otherness in question – or, more openly formulated: a meaningful relationship. If other people or nature are outdistanced merely as objects separated form ourselves as subjects, then we have renounced any obligation to responsibility towards these objects. As merely an object, people and nature are not subjects to respectful treatment and do not represent an end in themselves; but they lie open to being exploited as a means, as a resource to achieve our ego-centred aims. Hence, a committing sense of meaning in the relationship with the otherness in question is assumed to be a second condition for responsibility.

The above considerations lead to a general perspective on responsibility, expressed by two basic assumptions (Christensen 2004):

1) The *necessity* of responsible action in relation to an otherness depends on a *committing sense of meaning in the relationship* between ourselves and the otherness in question.
2) The *ability* to take responsible action depends on the *freedom of people* to act according to the experienced necessity.

The two core concepts, 'committing sense of meaning in the relationship'[1] and 'freedom of people', are subjects to a variety of interpretations, depending on history and culture. No culture should monopolise the interpretation. For instance, human freedom is a key concept in modern Western culture, but often interpreted in a specific way, namely in terms of freedom and rights of the individual person. The intention of intercultural dialogue challenges a Western person (such as the author) to adopt an open-minded approach to various interpretations of the concept of 'freedom of people' and how different interpretations may interact with responsibility towards an otherness.

Immediately, the two assumptions may appear as opposites, but they should be perceived as supplementary or rather as parts of the same piece. Freedom of people without a meaningful relationship with the otherness may very easily lead to the exercise of power. Meaning in the relationship with the otherness without freedom of people may very easily lead to subjection under enforced doctrines.

A critical discussion of Western culture

Three main problems

A critical discussion of Western culture will pay attention to three main problems, meaning three constraints on responsible attitudes and actions.

Problem A: Causes of ecological problems (including human-induced climate change).
A dominant view in Western culture is that man is separated from nature and has the right to exercise power over nature for the sake of human wealth and welfare. Man's power over nature is legitimated by man's freedom from nature at the expense of a committing meaning in the relationship with nature. Thereby, a path is opened to exploitation of nature for human purposes, resulting in a pressure on nature (ecological problems).

Problem B: Barriers to solutions to ecological problems.
Cultures may be subject to 'context fixation', meaning that efforts to solve historically new problems refer to the same basic views that lie behind the emergence of the problems. When this happens, the risk is that the problems continue to be reinforced, relatively unaffected of the efforts to solve them. This second problem concerns the way of reacting to the problems, especially the models of problem-solving.

Problem C: Barriers to an equal dialogue between cultures.
The powerful force of Western culture towards nature has a counterpart in its powerful force towards other cultures. First, the Western practise tends to expand globally, including the embedded

[1] Instead of this collocation of words, I can use a simplified term in Danish, namely 'samhørighed' (Christensen 2004). I have not found a good term in English with similar connotations. If we think in terms of 'mutual dependence' between man and nature, for instance, we should recognise that human life depends on nature, but nature can do without human beings.

views of nature, science, technology, and economy. Thereby, other cultural practises and views tend to be marginalised. Second, as Western culture may seem promising in terms of material wealth, this culture also attracts people from other cultures. Consequently, these people contribute to the erosion of potentials for responsibility towards nature in their own cultures.

A substantial elaboration on problem A is a precondition for further reflections on problems B and C.

Problem A: Causes of ecological problems

Notions of human freedom at the expense of meaning in the relationship between humans and nature

What is freedom in Western culture?

Certainly, notions of freedom include political freedom, intellectual freedom, and not least human rights centred round individual freedom. But freedom is also something else.

Freedom includes the right of individuals to pursue their aspirations for material wealth, despite the fact that extensive material consumption causes ecological problems. As consumers, we are free to buy goods within the extent of our financial capacity. Consumer freedom of choice is a keyword. As a specific but important example, individual freedom entails the right to move from place to place in flights and cars and other means of transport which contribute considerably to carbon dioxide emissions. Individual mobility symbolises individual freedom.

Freedom includes the right of producers to pursue their aspirations for economic profit, although with respect for environmental legislation. Free competition and free market, including free movement of capital, are keywords for private enterprises, even if the market-based competition exerts pressure on the producers to exert pressure on the natural environment.

The role of national governments and international authorities (such as the European Union) is twofold. Contemporary with their efforts to protect the environment, such authorities contribute to promoting the conditions of growth in material production and consumption. Two notions of responsibility conflict with each other; on the one hand, the responsibility towards the environment; on the other, the responsibility towards growth in the freedom to produce and consume.

The above considerations are more or less commonplaces. It is a commonplace that responsible governments should promote the growth in production and consumption to the benefit of societal and individual wealth. This is a commonplace, however, just because this kind of development is expressive of a dominant life perspective, deeply rooted in Western culture, but still more extended to the global level. Furthermore, this life perspective appears as incontestable, because it is closely associated with incontestable notions of human freedom.

When it comes to ecological responsibility, modern Western culture is faced with a difficulty. What should determine the necessity of responsibility towards nature? Certainly, a committing sense of meaning in the man-nature relationship may lie behind current activities for preservation of nature, such as an attitude of respect for eco-diversity or bio-diversity. Historically, however, a dominant view of nature is the emancipation of man from nature. Freedom of man from nature includes the freedom of man to gain power over nature.

The history behind man's power over nature is complex and includes many controversies (cf. discussions in, among others, White 1967, Passmore 1974, Attfield 1991). One attempt - indeed very simplified - to identify basic issues refer to three points, namely man's right, man's ability, and man's will to master and exploit nature (Christensen 2007).

Man's right to master nature

Briefly pointed out, man's rightful freedom to exercise mastery over nature is legitimated by the following conceptions of man's place and role in nature:

a) Man is separated from nature. This implies that nature is defined as an external entity.
b) Man is superior to nature. This implies that nature is perceived as subordinate to man.
c) No values in nature and no alliance between man and nature exist, which could oblige man to take care of nature.
d) Values and obligations belong to the human sphere, exclusively.

Man's mastery over nature concerns the secular sphere, centred round science and technology in combination with economy and legislation. However, the secular view of nature has religious roots.

In the religious tradition, the Judeo-Christian, man was created in God's image, and it was man's duty on earth to fulfil the divine command. The tradition contains an important distinction between the Creator and the Creation, between the divine and the mundane, between God and nature. With reference to one of the early Church Fathers, St. Augustine (about 397), man should renounce any interest in nature as a substance, both his carnal desire and his empirical curiosity. The idea of human freedom did not concern any bodily mass, such as the physical qualities of man and nature, but the human soul in its relation to the transcendent God and the eternal life. For instance, St. Augustine reports his sense of freedom when he had released himself from the sensuous desire to achieve a spiritual contact with the divinity: "Now was my soul free from the gnawing cares of seeking and getting, of wallowing in the mire and scratching the itch of lust" (St. Augustine, Book 9, Chapter I).

The religious tradition implied that nature was perceived as empty of value. Nature did not contain any kind of gods, souls or spiritual affinity with man (qua idolatry, immanent divinities were forbidden). Man's superior place, compared with nature, referred to the view that man was created in God's image. When later in history the secular sphere took a dominant position, combined with an outward interest in nature, it could build on the religious tradition (even if the secular sphere defined itself in contrast to the religious sphere). Nature lay open to being defined as an object of empirical studies and as a means of human utilisation. Man had free access to capture his rightful place as superior to nature and assume his rightful role as the master of nature. Values and obligations were determined within the human sphere, exclusively. Secular affairs such as the development of science, technology, and economy should in no way be influenced by moral authorities beyond the human sphere, let it be nature or God.

Man's ability to master nature

Man's ability to master nature depends on the development of knowledge about nature and practical means which can be used for exercising mastery, especially objective knowledge (or *pretended* value-free knowledge) in combination with powerful technology.

Historically, Francis Bacon's ideas about a practically oriented science may serve as an illustrative focal point (Bacon 1996). Bacon pointed out that "human knowledge and human power come to the same thing", and "we can only command Nature by obeying her". Obeying nature depends on knowledge of causes and effects, for "where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced" (ibid, aphorism 3). Bacon's ideas concerned "the kingdom of man" (ibid, p. 43), among others expressed by his intention to "lay down firmer foundations for the power and grandeur of man, and extend their limits more widely" (ibid, aphorism 116). "The dominion of man over nature", Bacon stated, "rests solely in the arts and the sciences"; so "let the human race only recover its God-given right over Nature, and be given the necessary power; then right reason and sound religion will govern the exercise of it" (ibid, aphorism 129).

Bacon's ideas were published in 1620. However, and in spite of many historical changes, similar ideas characterise the current striving for a scientific and technological development which extends man's ability to gain power over nature. In his book 'Chance and necessity' from 1970, a modern author, Jacques Monod, argued in favour of objective knowledge, because of its ability to promote human performance. Even though the idea of objectivity in science appeared as "cold and austere, proposing no explanation but imposing an ascetic renunciation of all other spiritual fare", and even though "it ended the ancient animist covenant between man and nature", there is one reason that this idea has gained priority: "if it has commanded recognition, this is solely because of its prodigious powers of performance." Finally, Monod concludes: "The ancient covenant is in pieces; man at last knows that he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe, out of which he emerged only by chance. Neither his destiny nor his duty have been written down. The kingdom above or the darkness below: it is for him to choose" (Monod 1970).

Man's will to master nature

Our will depends on our life perspectives, including the perspectives of life embedded in our practical activities. Especially, our aspirations for ceaseless progress in material wealth are expressive of a life perspective which implies man's will to master nature. Both altruistic and egoistic motives may appear.

The *altruistic* man is the citizen who dedicates his will to the preservation and creation of societal values. Historically, an important idea is that societal values are created by human beings and by means of human labour, especially by improving nature, while nature in itself contains no real value. A glance at John Locke is illustrative.

In 1690, John Locke stated that man was determined to labour, both because of religion and because of human reason: "God commanded and his wants forced him to labour" (Locke 1690, sec. 35, cf. sec. 32). God had given the earth to "mankind in common" (ibid, sec. 25), but "every man has a property in his own person", including "the labour of his body" (ibid, sec. 27). If a man improves a piece of land by means of his own labour, and thereby adds something to it "that was his property", then he is allowed to "enclose it from the common" (ibid, sec. 32). Subduing the earth and improving it for the benefit of (human) life by laying down labour upon it (cf. ibid, sec. 32) contributes to the societal value creation: "… he who appropriates land to himself by his labour, does not lessen, but increase the common stock of mankind" (ibid, sec. 37). The raw nature, as it is in itself, contributes with nearly no value: "It is labour then which puts the greatest part of value upon land … nature and the earth furnished only the almost worthless materials, as in themselves" (ibid, sec. 43).

From Locke's perspective, and unlike for instance the view of the contemplative man, the industrious man who adopts the claim to work as a dominant life perspective should be idealised as a socially responsible being. It means that willingness to work in order to contribute to the mastery and improvement of nature for the sake of value creation within the human sphere is an expression of responsibility. Social responsibility may include the view that also poor people should enjoy the material richness known from the industrialised countries. Additionally: How could people be expected to claim responsibility for nature and ecology, including the entire earth, if they have not achieved material richness?

The *egoistic* man is the individual whose will is directed towards his own self-interest, whether as a producer who strives to gain profit or a consumer who strives to acquire material goods. It is the man who adopts the idea that more money and more consumer goods are expressive of human freedom - maybe the meaning of life? It is the man who subordinates his aspirations to the idea of ceaseless progress, defined in terms of growth in material production and consumption. 'To earn money, to buy, to consume' appears a leading life perspective; if not explicitly formulated, then

implicitly embedded in the factual behaviour, permitted by the basic idea that human freedom is a separate issue, independent of man's relationship with nature and despite the ecological consequences.

'Greed and growth' may stand as keywords for the egoistic man. Greed appears a *leitmotif* of the individual who orients his will towards buying and consuming more and more. Governments may perceive themselves as responsible, and thereby altruistic, when the political will is oriented towards promoting growth in production and consumption, underpinned by conventional scientific and technological development. A powerful argument is that if this policy is not followed, then the nation is in danger of loosing its wealth and its internationally competitive strength. The altruism, however, remains solely within the human sphere, but excludes the non-human nature.

A predominant view - in spite of changeability and multiplicity

Obviously, the above considerations do not represent the whole truth. Western culture, as well as globalised culture, changes historically, influenced by changing conditions. At all levels from local to global, ecological problems have been given increased attention during the latest maybe half a century. From about 1970, environmental movements have challenged the dominating concepts of development. Since the Brundtland Report was published in 1987, the idea that environment and development are inseparable has gained acceptance, and sustainable development has become a catchword. Recently, the climate change problem (which has been known for decades, cf. the fact that IPCC, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, was established in 1988), has been put on the global political agenda.

The historical changeability has a counterpart in cultural and sub-cultural multiplicity. Within a westernised cultural context, various practises, such as endeavours to conserve ecological systems, natural resorts, species of plants and animals, as well as endeavours to create ecologically sound systems of production, indicate the existence of a committing sense of meaning in the man-nature relationship.

Despite of many nuances, however, the picture painted above mirrors a *predominant* view, embedded in the globalised practise and underlying the global ecological problems in our age. With this picture as a background, it is time to comment on the two other main problems, previously mentioned, namely barriers to solutions to the ecological problems and barriers to an equal dialogue between cultures.

Problem B: Barriers to solutions to the ecological problems

The tendency to 'context-fixation' and the quest for change of context

Problems change during the course of history. The change may include a change of the essential character of the problems, meaning that the problems appear to be of a new kind. When this happens, a responsible attitude should include a search for new and adequate models of problem-solving, different from the hitherto applied models, both practically and as regards the underlying conceptions.

Historically, many societies have been faced with ecological problems. However, the current ecological problems in general, and especially the human-induced climatic change, appear qualitatively different from previous problems. Unlike the global extent of the current challenges, the challenges in former times were often more or less locally situated. In principle, people could respond to the problems in two ways. One possibility was to develop new conceptions, values, and practises locally. Another possibility was to migrate to another locality and thereby escape the problems.

Also today, many people make an attempt to use the second possibility by migrating in order to create better living conditions. The climate change, however, is a condition which is not subject to evasion. Therefore, we are compelled to choose the first possibility by developing new models of problem-solving, including conceptions, values, and practises, but at a global level and as a challenge to all societies and cultures on earth.

It happens that humans and societies apply old models of problem-solving to new problems, regardless of the qualitative difference between the problems of different ages. When this is the case, a meta-problem turns up, here designated a 'context-fixation'. A 'context-fixation' appears whenever the attempted solution to a problem reproduces its causes, at least in important respects. The term of 'context-fixation' refers to a persistence of the context by which both the causes of the problems and the attempted solutions are framed.[2]

Even if old problem-solving models did respond adequately to contemporary problems, it is not certain that the same models would also respond adequately to current problems. As indicated, the development of objective sciences and powerful technologies aiming at growth in material wealth is based on the idea of man's freedom from nature and the perception of nature as a means for man's mastery and exploitation. This development *may* have responded adequately to the poverty of people in a previous time, but forms a barrier to the development of thorough solutions to the present global ecological problems.

More of the same – i.e. more scientific and technological development, based on the same cultural view that lies behind the problems - tends to characterise attempted solutions. With reference to 'new kinds of fundamentalism', the Finnish philosopher G.H. von Wright points out a fundamentalist doctrine, the attitude called 'scientism'. "This term", von Wright states, "denotes the belief that science and technology is capable of solving the problems caused by their own progress and that they are capable of creating a life-style which may initiate a new era in the history of mankind" (von Wright 1994, 82). Even though it may be seen as an extreme example, efforts to develop carbon capture and storage technologies may show the point.

Also, the continued efforts to maximise growth in material production and consumption tend to hold their own inertia. From an altruistic view, the responsible politician may argue that the continued growth is a precondition for solving ecological problems. The producer may argue that he exercises responsibility, both because he creates jobs and because he contributes to the wealth in his society. The individual consumer will hardly consider himself as greedy when he strives for earning more money in order to travel more by flight, buy a bigger house and a bigger car, or in general, to extend his material consumption. He just follows the ordinary behaviour in his own culture: He uses his freedom to buy and consume within the limits of his financial capacity – and he demonstrates responsibility for the welfare of his family.

Within the cultural context, all such stakeholders may claim to act responsibly, despite the fact that their activities contribute to reinforcing the human influence on the climate. Without really disturbing the context, the predominating climate discourse is centred round the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. While reduction refers to the level of content, the quest for new models of problem-solving will imply a change of context. Change of context, however, is still more provoking than change of content, as it will imply a change of well-established rights, customs, and, not least, life perspectives, including deeply rooted notions of freedom.

Tendencies to persistence despite change

In general, all cultures hold both static and dynamic elements. The static quality of the indicated context-fixation is not absolute, and the tendencies to persistence are met by change. Prompted by

[2] Considerations about persistence and change are inspired by Watzlawick et al 1974.

the awareness of the qualitatively new ecological problems, critical discussions about man's relation to nature as well as a search for alternatives have taken place during recent decades. The intention of a sustainable development may serve as an example.

At the ideal level, the Brundtland Report defined a sustainable development as a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, Chapter 2, paragraph 1). Compared with a characteristic of previous ethics, namely the proximity in (Western) ethics emphasised by the German philosopher Hans Jonas, who indicates "the confinement (of traditional ethics) to the immediate setting of the action" (Jonas 1984, 5), the definition extends ethical considerations to mankind in general, including future generations. So far, the definition represents a crucial change. On the other hand, the definition reproduces the human-centred view known from the Western tradition, namely by focusing on human needs. From this point, the definition represents a persistent tendency, exactly a 'context-fixation'.

At the practical level, endeavours for a sustainable development may include preservation of biodiversity, not substantiated by human needs, merely, but also by a committing sense of meaning in the man-nature relationship, independent of human utilisation. Contemporary with such potentials for change, however, practise carries its own inertia. G. H. von Wright indicates the existence of an autonomous techno-system, "an alliance between science, technology and industrial production", which develops on its own conditions and follows its own laws, independent of the traditional political systems (von Wright 1994, 111-114). To a high degree, the power of the techno-system, based on man's mastery of nature; directed towards growth in material production and consumption, and resulting in ecological problems, seems to outdistance the power of the political endeavours to achieve sustainable development. This is not only due to the inherent inertia of the techno-system, but also because the political systems continue to support the development of the selfsame system, despite of the agenda of sustainable development.

Figuratively speaking, a context-fixation implies that the cure reproduces the causes behind the symptoms. Consequently, the cure may even intensify the illness. While people may use pills to alleviate symptoms, political systems may apply the carbon dioxide quota trading system as a medicament, based on the market mechanism which promotes the development of the techno-system (the market mechanism may even be perceived as an integrated part of the techno-system). Even if the CO2 trade indicates an adaptation of the market mechanism to new problems, it also exemplifies the tendency to stick to old models of problem-solving, including the underlying conceptions and values.

Problem C: Barriers to an equal dialogue between cultures.

The power of the 'techno-system' over the human mind

Ziauddin Sardar, a Pakistan-born culture critic, opens an article about 'Development and the Locations of Eurocentrism' with the following sentence: "The real power of the West is not located in its economic muscle and technological might. Rather it resides in its power to define" (Sardar 1999, 44). Sardar indicates how many Eurocentric categories play an intrinsic role in development. Among others, he mentions the categories liberal secularism, freedom, nation state, civilization, modernization, and the ideology of science and technology, and he pinpoints that "development continues to mean what it always meant: a standard by which the West measures the non-West" (ibid, 49, 52-53).

Power over nature has a counterpart in power over the human mind. First, the idea of man's legitimate power over nature, manifested in scientific, technological, and economic development, briefly spoken the 'techno-system', tends to invade the mind of people in Western culture - if not as

a spoken ideal, then when it comes to practise (cf. the above discussion of problem B). Second, the invasion of the human mind of such ideas is not limited to Western culture, but tends to be extended globally. The consequence is marginalisation of cultures with traditionally more cautious attitudes to and practises with nature.

A look into such culture may contribute to the discussion.

In an analysis of the cosmology, including view of nature, among the Tukano Indians of the Colombian Northwest Amazon, the Austrian born anthropologist G. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1976) discusses the Tukano universe as "a limited, well defined proposition with finite and restricted resources" (ibid, 309). In a spiritual sense, not only in a germinal, biological sense, the energy of the sun, imagined by the Tukanos in terms of seminal light and heat, causes plants to grow, fruit to ripen, and mankind and animals to reproduce. The spiritual energy from the sun is a masculine element that fertilises a feminine element; that is, this world. As soon as the game or the fruit is converted into nourishment, the energy is conserved, but now at the level of society. However, society only borrows this energy and it should be reincorporated into the cosmic circuit.

One practical implication of this conception is that the energy is thought to be diminished when an animal is killed. The hunter should obtain permission from 'The Master of Animals' to kill, and he should undergo a rigorous preparation, among others in terms of sexual continence in accordance with the seminal character of the circuit of spiritual energy. For instance, the hunter should refrain from all sexual relations some days before hunting, and, furthermore, he should not have had any dreams with an erotic content. Moreover, it is necessary that none of the women who live in his household is menstruating.

Another practical consequence of the Tukano cosmology appears when a person gets ill. Illness is perceived as a consequence of disturbance of the balance in the spiritual energy flow, and the shaman as a healer does not so much interfere at the individual level, but rather at the level of supra-individual structures. The diagnosis may be established by experiences in the shaman's dream or trance.

Among the Tukano's, Reichel-Dolmatoff states, "there is usually little interest in new knowledge that might be used for exploiting the environment more effectively and there is little concern for maximising short-term gains or for obtaining more food or raw-materials than are actually needed." On the contrary, there is interest in knowledge about "what the physical world needs from man" as "man must bring himself into conformity with nature if he wants to exist as part of nature's unity, and must fit his demands to nature's availabilities" (ibid, 310-311).

Faced with such view, a person who is enslaved by the power of the globally dominating conceptions of science, technology, and economy may object: 'This sounds very nice, but also too "romantic".' Furthermore: 'Surely, the Tukano universe is expressive of a meaningful and committing relationship between man and nature - but what about notions of human freedom?'

Moreover: 'Even if the Tukano universe may prompt to responsibility towards nature, it solely functions under local conditions; it does not correspond to the challenges of a globalised world.'

Obviously, my point is not to argue that we all should think and act like the Tukano indians, but only to indicate the marginalisation of such culture. In agreement with Sardar's accentuation of the power of Western definitions: Real knowledge is based on the principles of the Western category 'science'! Technological innovation is scientifically based! Economy is about material growth, conditioned by market mechanisms, and economy is calculable in terms of money! These are keystones of *Development* (in the singular and with capital letter 'D'). These are core conceptions of the globalised techno-system. This techno-system is in no way subject to being contradicted or challenged profoundly. Solely, it is subject to correctives, for instance by means of environmental legislation, which may contribute to its continuance. From this perspective, the Tukano view makes no sense. It is nonsense.

An inclusion / exclusion perspective

An inclusion / exclusion perspective may contribute to the point. Imagine the techno-system as a sphere, diffuse in its shape but widespread over the planet of earth; covering some localities and regions but not all; benefiting some people in these localities and regions but not all; influencing some but not all of the conceptions and values of these people, but nevertheless powerful in its practical implications, including its pressure on the natural resources, the ecosystems, and also the climate. If you are included in this sphere; if your viewpoints and arguments respect its basic premises, then you may be listened to, even when you put forward critical points. But if your viewpoints and arguments are outside the sphere; if they are too different from the dominating context, then you may very easily become exposed to exclusion: 'This is not relevant. This is not the way we do things around here.'

As a member of Western culture, I have indeed no personal experience of the exclusion of cultures different from the Western. But I have the experience from sub-cultural views, different from the predominating cultural views, not at least the views among people engaged in organic farming. When organic farming arose in the 1970s, it appeared to be a radical alternative, not only technically, but also as regards conceptions of and attitudes to human life, including the relationship between humans and nature. In retrospect, my interpretation is that there was a quest for ideas and practises that satisfied the simultaneity of human freedom and responsibility towards nature, based on a committing sense of meaning in the relationship. As humans, it was often stated, 'we are not separate from nature, but part of nature'. The predominating reaction from 'the establishment' was an exclusion of these sub-cultural views: 'This is romanticism, religion, nostalgia' (Christensen 1998).

Marginalisation or exclusion forms a barrier to an equal dialogue, whether it is between a historically dominating culture and emerging sub-cultures or between a globally dominating culture and different cultures on earth. Marginalisation may result in the experience of alienation, especially when the difficulty of being listened to and respected evokes a sense of cultural inferiority or even a personal failure.

The most serious threat to an equal dialogue, however, is not the very process of exclusion. Rather, it is the aspiration to be included. This aspiration may show itself in two ways.

First, it is a matter of fact that the globalised techno-system produces material wealth, at least to the benefit of *some* people. If not experienced otherwise, then television, films and advertisements will show. Perceived as a manifestation of human freedom, the promising prospects of access to material goods and material consumption may seem more attractive to materially poor people than the challenges of realising a lifestyle that includes responsibility towards nature.

Second, aspirations to become a respected member of and participant in a factually dominating culture may result in the adoption of the language of this culture, its words and their connotations; thereby also its concepts and categories and definitions, such as the globally dominating conceptions of science, technology, and economy, including the perception of nature as a 'resource'. When the language of power is adopted, then the power has really gained impact.

Final considerations on intercultural dialogue and responsibility towards nature

A core question and additional reflections

Questioning the self-evidence of basic assumptions in ones own culture is a precondition for entering into an open-minded dialogue with other cultures. The above considerations on three main problems are meant to render visible such basic assumptions and to challenge their self-evidence.

In the search for an approach to an *intercultural dialogue* that *addresses the current global ecological problems adequately,* two conditions of responsibility have been stated. The one concerns a committing sense of meaning in our relation to the otherness in question. The other concerns human freedom as a precondition for taking responsible action. A core question is how those two conditions can go hand in hand, particularly in man's relation to nature:

> *How can a committing sense of meaning in man's relation to nature go hand in hand with human freedom?*

Two additional reflections are important:

1. *Re 'intercultural dialogue'.* The quest is for an approach to dialogue on responsibility with cross-cultural appeal – or stronger formulated: with universally human appeal. The validity in this respect is open to discussion, knowing fully that the identification of the two conditions of responsibility is influenced by the attention given to a lack of responsibility in the Western view of nature, especially the perversion of human freedom and the absence of a committing sense of meaning in the man-nature relationship.
2. *Re 'addresses the current ecological problems adequately'.* If the simultaneity of the two conditions of responsibility should gain impact, not only at an ideal level, but also with considerable influence on the globally dominating practise, then there is a quest for positively engaging notions of both. The quest is for responses to the question that may serve as *leitmotifs* for the good life.

Tentative hints on implications of the question

As a participant in a dialogue, you can contribute with views solely from your own position, but you cannot speak from the positions of other participants. If you attempt to do so, you project your own views onto the others instead of listening respectfully. Therefore, final and tentative hints on implications of the above formulated question will be restricted to views that refer to my own cultural background. I venture to include references to a few Scandinavian philosophers, even though my interpretations and comments will appear extremely brief.

Above, I mentioned the ideas about and experiments with organic farming in Denmark. At least in its initial phase, organic farming appeared as a search for a positive perspective. Responsibility towards nature, based on a closer contact and co-operation with nature, should be combined with an attentive attitude to human life and to human creativity, thereby expressive of a search for human freedom.

In the same period, the 1970s, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (1976) propounded ideas about an eco-philosophy, designated 'Ecosophy T' (the letter 'T' indicates the possibility of a variety of 'ecosophies'). Of particular interest in this connection is Næss' discussion of two inseparable concepts of 'identification' and 'self-realisation', framed by the idea that nothing exists only for the sake of human beings, but everything is interconnected, even though life has a particular position. Our ability to identify ourselves with life as such and with everything is

unlimited. This implies that we, the human beings, form part of meaningful relationships. Self-realisation has connotations of freedom, not in an ego-centred sense, but related to a 'bigger Self'. An interpretation of Næss is that what is considered as best for our 'Self' is intimately connected with the best to life and to everything, including the best to non-human nature.

If freedom is linked to self-reflection, existentially spoken, then it seems evident that the quest for freedom should imply that attention is given to our embedment in bigger connections. Even a down-to-earth view urges us to realise that we have not born ourselves, and mankind did not emerge from nothing. More profoundly, freedom perceived as an existential issue that concerns our experience of our 'self' may lead to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard: *First*, the self is a relation relating itself to itself; *second*, the self is not the relation as such, but the fact that the relation is relating itself to itself; *third*, the fact that the relation is relating itself to itself implies its relation to an otherness, namely the otherness that has established the whole relationship (Kierkegaard 1989, 173). Kierkegaard's interpretation of the self refers to Christianity, but the interesting point in this connection is the very figure of thought; namely that the human self is inseparably related to an underlying otherness. The core point is that the more we realise our selves attentively, the more it becomes obvious that we are meaningfully related to an otherness, and this otherness may include non-human nature or the planet of earth.

The Danish philosopher K. E. Løgstrup (1995a, 1995b) argues that nature is not merely our surroundings, but also our origin. Not least with reference to our sensory perception, it appears obvious that we are embedded in nature (including the whole universe). Particularly, Løgstrup emphasises the concept of 'distanceless sensation': "The edge of the wood is not outside my sensation, but outside my body. The edge of the wood is not different from me due to my sensation, but due to my understanding." And Løgstrup continues: "If it was up to the sensation, there would be no difference between outside and inside, no more than there would be any difference between the sensed and the sensing" (Løgstrup 1995b, 111). It is not the sensory perception as such that establishes a distance to nature, but our understanding, and still more our transformation of the understanding into language. A possible interpretation of Løgstrup is that sensory awareness implies an experience of the inseparability between our selves and nature. A possible objection is the point that the sensory awareness is merely contemplative, but of no use in terms of practical matters. However, while "the scientist eliminates the sensation, the artist insists on it", Løgstrup states (1995a, 18). As an alternative to the reifying attitude to life and world that penetrates the globalised techno-system, the quest for a responsible practise towards nature may lead to a focus on an artistic attitude to human insight as well as to human creativity (cf. Christensen 2009).

These few hints indicate *some* approaches in which human freedom and meaning in the relationship with nature appear as parts of the same piece, rather than opposites.

Two questions remain open:

1. *Re 'intercultural dialogue'*. Assuming that the general concepts of 'human freedom' and 'a committing sense of meaning in the human relationship with non-human nature' as well as their interrelations are subject to a variety of specific conceptions, depending on culture, the following question may promote a further discussion: How do ideas of the inseparability of those two concepts manifest themselves in non-Western cultures?
2. *Re 'responsibility towards nature'*. What could be the practical implications of such ideas? And moreover: What could be done to promote the impact of the ideas and practises on the globally dominating development, including the globally dominating problem-solving models, not only at the level of content, but also at the level of context?

Evidently, responses to question 2 will challenge well-established scientific, technological, economic, and political ideas and practises and confront well-established lifestyles. Exactly

therefore, and as a motivation for change, it is important that responses to question 1 include positively engaging perspectives on the good life.

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